

Impacts of the MBA Program to Life Long Learning Skills: An Evaluation from a Public University in Malaysia

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Article Info

Volume 81

Page Number: 2770 - 2779

Publication Issue:

November-December 2019

Abstract:

The goal of this research is to assess the impacts of lifelong learning skills and job performance among students of Masters of Business Administration (MBA). Four lifelong learning skills were included in this study: managerial skill, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, hard skills, and soft skills. Since there are high rates of unemployment among graduates nowadays, it is important to know the skills provided to the students and their correlation for student's employability in the future. This study employed 101 MBA students from the East regent of Malaysia as the sample. Feedbacks from students were gathered through a set of questionnaires, and the data were analyzed through SPSS 23.0. The results indicated that self-esteem and interpersonal skills had the most significant effect towards job performance, among other factors. Meanwhile, managerial skills had the weakest effect towards job performance.

Article History

Article Received: 5 March 2019

Revised: 18 May 2019

Accepted: 24 September 2019

Publication: 14 December 2019

Keywords: Education, Lifelong learning skills, Malaysia, MBA

1. INTRODUCTION

The Master of Business Administration program is being updated at a public university in the eastern region of Malaysia, and from that, it also measured the lifelong learning abilities of the student and the result of the program. In addition to creating skilled and knowledgeable graduates relevant to market needs, the way adult learning is handled and influenced by schools and universities is extremely important in higher education because it leads to lifelong learning for students (Choi, 2017). Therefore, the community sees educational institutions as a center of knowledge that produces knowledgeable students, who are also confident and self-reliant. Skills are, according to Olson and Shultz (2013), individual-specific skills generated through awareness, learning, practice, and abilities. Shultz added that a director also needs to develop lifelong learning skills in addition to basic management skills to succeed in his field of work.

Lifelong education is intended to enhance the quality of individual and community life. The goal

is to provide education and training to all with one of the goals of human capital development. In the school environment, human capital growth concentrates on students' values, discipline, personality, morals and identity systems, to produce workforce that is competent in science and technology, while also innovative, creative and marketable. The learning process should not be stopped after school, but adult learners should be continued (Choi, 2017).

Lifelong learning encourages creativity and innovation and gives a holistic platform for economic and social development (European Communities Commission, 2007). In terms of their need to remain relevant to their final goal, where in this case, their contribution to the sector, education has not modified a lot. Schools also turn to organizations or industries abroad to see what is required in their programs. Lifelong learning is one of the key components needed today where institutes provide programs for the development of abilities, knowledge and skills, either formal or informal, based on experience and practice in the workplace. Lifelong learning has become part of

culture and a way of life to support the development of human capital in accordance with the needs of knowledge-based economy and entrepreneurship through distance education, e-learning, workforce learning and part-time learning (Hallinger & Lu, 2013).

Malaysia has now made the lifelong learning agenda a medium for enhancing human capital capabilities. After basic and tertiary education, lifelong learning is developed as a third pillar, and it is considered significant to increase the percentage of highly skilled workers from 28% by 2015 to 33%. Various capital injections are granted through the Malaysian Tenth Program (RMK-10) to ensure lifelong education programs. Institutions involved in providing opportunities to pursue lifelong learning involve community colleges, polytechnics, public higher learning institutions, government agencies, and institutions of distance education (Mohamed, Ibrahim Shaari & Shaari, 2014).

In order to ensure a smooth and effective lifelong learning policy, the Ministry of Higher Education has built a blueprint to adopt PSH 2011-2020 in line with the government's commitment to achieve a high-income economic status. The action plan is based on a study performed through the Lifelong Learning Initiative on capable, skilled and knowledgeable human capital criteria. One of the approaches under the plan is to provide sufficient financial support for lifelong learning in its adoption as a way of life and to strengthen the mechanisms and infrastructure for facilitating lifelong learning (Mohamed et al., 2014).

1.1 Problem Statement

As part of the national education and training system, lifelong learning plays an important role. Lifelong learning has become an important element in Malaysian society due to the pressure of globalization, rapid technological change and population growth (Ministry of Education, 2013). It has become one of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) National Agendas in which development of human resources is more crucial and emphasized. Studies have displayed that lifelong learning can lead to an increase in quality of work and can grow the self, hence the organizations indirectly (Burkett, 1960; Peters, 2015; Levens, 2017). Most skills and abilities provided by

educational management are believed to be inapplicable in a constantly changing environment compared to skills gained through lifelong learning programs where students are able to express creativity and more critical thinking (Peters, 2015). Furthermore, a master program at a university cannot be said to be successful if the produced graduates are not able to meet the requirements of the organizations and adapt themselves to the working environment. Based on the scenario described, the evaluation of the skills needed by the business management graduates should be done in order to fulfil the organization's requirement and this will further lead to the economic development of the country. Somehow, scientific studies on this matter are too few in the country.

1.2 Research Objective

There are six main objectives of this study which are: to examine the relationship between managerial skills and job performance, to examine the relationship between self-esteem and job performance, to examine the relationship between interpersonal skills and job performance, to examine the relationship between hard skills and job performance, to evaluate which lifelong learning relating to managerial skills - self-esteem, interpersonal skills or hard skills - that is significant to job performance, and lastly, to see which of the independent variables are the least significant towards job performance.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Masters of Business Administration

MBA programs around the world have been growing rapidly. The number of business school graduates continues to rise every year. Some 300,000 students are enrolled in MBA programs each year (Gupta & Bennett, 2014). MBA programs were studied, evaluated and criticized from a variety of perspectives. Both scholars and practitioners noted the challenges faced by business schools in addressing the current state of MBA programs and preparing for MBA's future. One of the most significant aspects is to guarantee MBA's sustainability and relevance to industry and organizations (Pfeffer & Fong 2002, 2004; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005).

There are many critics of management education where scholars believe that MBA programs are in crisis because their course framework cannot adequately address the knowledge expertise and skills that business students need to learn to be successful (Kleiman&Kass, 2007). In their study, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) mentioned that there is little evidence to support and prove that business school master graduates can use their knowledge to improve their career or even increase their wages. They also stated in their study that due to insufficient training obtained during the MBA course, students are unable to implement necessary skills on the job. Whereas the study by Kang and Sharma (2012) revealed that there are significant differences between MBA workers in terms of communication skills, decision-making skills, leadership qualities, responsibilities and adaptability to modify. Their research also showed that there is also a higher rate of adaptation for those with MBA to new environment and they are not afraid to change. This would lead to better management skills where they would be able to look at things from a different angle, making better decision-makers (Kang & Sharma, 2012).

Studying in a certain type of school, whether business school or other types of school doesn't ensure the employability of the graduate, but rather what skills graduate are able to achieve while in school that is important (Tyson, 2005). MBA curriculum is not often linked to the practical concerns where they are more linked to industrial needs (Pfeffer& Fong, 2002). Bennis and O'Toole (2005) mentioned in their research that sometimes research produced in business schools are less significant compared to the working environment, where some might see this as having hands on working skill to be more important compared to receiving an MBA degree. This might be due to the lack of engagement among academicians and pedagogical structure within business programs with the outside world which has led to much criticism over the gap between theory and practice in graduate management education (Weiser, 2016). Therefore, business faculties should aim for developing excellent future executives by developing their students with skills and attributes of work that is relevant to the industry. MBA graduates should be able to take practical action and at the same time,

try to boost integrity, judgement, intuition, and other essential leadership qualities (Tyson, 2005).

Tyson (2005) also mentioned that business school must train their students to think, decide and act efficiently in order to survive the uncertainty of world business environment. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) also indicated that the players in business education like training and education generally have limited connection to the field of management organization. This was supported by Bennis and O'Toole (2005) who stated that the "faculty are disconnected from the field of management." Bennis and O'Toole (2005) also suggested that students should understand the gap between business knowledge and actually practice, and how they should implement this into their learning.

2.2 MBA Skills Reflected in Lifelong Learning

The study revealed in the National Adult Learning Survey and the British Cohort Study of 1970 that there are significant differences in perceptions between those who engage in adult lifelong learning programs such as the MBA program relative to those who do not (Brooks, 2006). The common view shared among researchers is that MBA clearly aims at adding value to students by teaching them relevant business-related management skills while at the same time having an inspiring effect on the overall corporate world performance (Boyatzis&Renio, 1989; Louw et al., 2001; Baruch & Leeming, 2001; Sturges et al., 2003, as cited in Mihail&Kloutsiniotis, 2014). However, MBA graduates' qualifications are known to produce economic benefits as well as to create success in the professions of the graduate (Mihail&Kloutsiniotis, 2014). Ng et al. (2008) discovered that U.S. students decided to continue the self-development journey of the MBA, particularly in education. The skills listed needed for life-long learning are management skills, self-esteem and confidence, interpersonal skills, and hard skills.

Having the right management skills is one of the main factors why adult learners have chosen to pursue their MBAs where they can grow their career through in-class insights and practical applications (Temtime&Mmerekil,

2011).Kretovics (1999) stated that the most efficient of the MBA program was 'hard' management skills, where the program applied goals, information gathering, theory application, quantitative analysis, and technology application. In their study Moghrabi, Sharabati, Khader (2014) claimed that a successful manager is not only able to manage recourse efficiently and effectively in order to achieve goals, but should be beyond that; they must have managerial skills in terms of coaching and mentoring, teambuilding, tracking, managing and facilitating, as well as being able to conduct in an informal working environment. In their study on MBA, Varela, Burke, Michel (2013) stated the need to update the content and curriculum in order to assess the quality of management skills among students as there are numerous programs that do not provide adequate skills related to industrial needs.

Baruch (2009) evaluated the impact of the MBA and it was concluded that the MBA program increased confidence, self-esteem and faith in the students, which helped to improve student interaction while faced with certain circumstances that also resulted to the advancement of one's career (Baruch, 2009; Baruch &Peiperl, 2000). In the first place, self-esteem is, according to Brandt (2005), a belief in the ability to act and face life's challenges. Secondly, it involves believing in our right to be happy, feeling worthy, enabling us to improve our needs and desires and to enjoy the fruits of our hard work. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Need as summarized by Kaur (2013), self-esteem is a human need which requires satisfaction or fulfillment in order to proceed to a higher level of need. The need for self-esteem of Maslow is split into two types: self-esteem and respect from others. Maslow (in Schultz, 1981) also suggests that once a person feels loved and has a sense of belonging, they grow a need for confidence to help them become better managers.

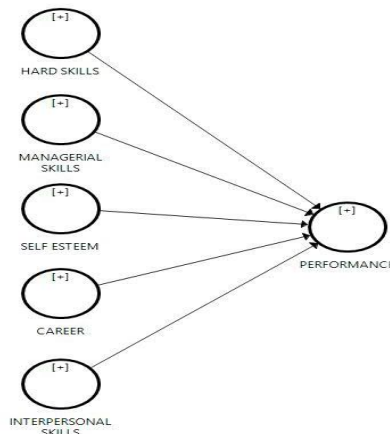


Figure 1: The Research Model

3 METHODOLOGY

Sample, Design and Procedure

This quantitative research utilized a cross sectional longitudinal study on new, current and graduated MBA students to measure significant factors that contributed to job performance. The instrument tool used was a 5 point likert scale survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was gathered over a four week period. MBA students at Malaysian public universities were theoretical sample population. For the sampling choice, a convenience sampling was adopted as the researcher had access to data for the students (Kamarudin, 2017). A total of 130 questionnaires with a response rate of 78% (101) were circulated.

3.1 Reliability and Validity

Reliability is the degree of consistency of a test (Kamarudin, 2018). A test is said to be reliable when the researcher was able to obtain same result while repeating the test under same condition. Validity is the degree to which a research is able to reflect the findings that the researcher is attempting to measure accurately (Mislevy, 2007). Cronbach's alpha, rho_A and composite reliability are greater than 0.7 showing that the reliability of this research is high while the values of AVE is greater than 0.5 showing sufficient convergent validity.

Table1.1 Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Career	0.962	0.967	0.966	0.614
Hard skills	0.912	0.92	0.927	0.585

Interpersonal skills	0.821	0.843	0.87	0.531
Managerial skills	0.865	0.879	0.902	0.649
Performance	0.831	0.834	0.881	0.597
Self-esteem	0.789	0.795	0.855	0.542

The table of Fornell-Larcker contrasted the association of AVE values between the constructs and the square root. If the square root of AVE values exceeds the inter-construct correlations, it

will show that the constructs have adequate discriminating validity. In this research, all of the constructs except self-esteem possess adequate discriminant validity.

Table 1.2 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Career	Hard skills	Interpersonal skills	Managerial skills	Performance	Self-esteem
Career	0.784					
Hard skills	0.529	0.765				
Interpersonal skills	0.521	0.672	0.729			
Managerial skills	0.6	0.72	0.661	0.806		
Performance	0.701	0.724	0.723	0.696	0.773	
Self-esteem	0.613	0.767	0.791	0.764	0.765	0.736

In order to test for convergent validity, cross loadings were calculated. On the other construct there is no item loaded higher that was not intended to be measured. Therefore, all constructs exhibited sufficient convergent validity in this research.

Table 1.3 Cross Loadings

	Career	Self-esteem	Hard skills	Interpersonal skills	Performance	Managerial skills
CR1	0.504	0.338	0.212	0.284	0.362	0.440
CR2	0.683	0.329	0.187	0.253	0.420	0.302
CR3	0.670	0.381	0.278	0.317	0.445	0.283
CR4	0.817	0.525	0.513	0.445	0.661	0.490
CR5	0.829	0.496	0.440	0.458	0.551	0.439
CR6	0.828	0.432	0.324	0.397	0.497	0.403
CR7	0.854	0.470	0.402	0.432	0.619	0.481
CR8	0.841	0.473	0.479	0.346	0.546	0.550
CR9	0.879	0.538	0.526	0.460	0.617	0.534
CR10	0.776	0.489	0.488	0.365	0.530	0.470
CR11	0.856	0.498	0.539	0.434	0.609	0.474
CR12	0.836	0.555	0.454	0.470	0.647	0.500
CR13	0.743	0.432	0.294	0.337	0.443	0.428
CR14	0.824	0.528	0.442	0.470	0.614	0.522
CR15	0.807	0.427	0.410	0.381	0.486	0.486
CR16	0.784	0.494	0.418	0.464	0.570	0.519
CR17	0.726	0.606	0.430	0.440	0.572	0.543

CR18	0.762	0.533	0.449	0.493	0.546	0.539
SE1	0.385	0.800	0.696	0.660	0.580	0.549
SE2	0.548	0.728	0.531	0.455	0.547	0.462
SE3	0.416	0.679	0.486	0.560	0.464	0.665
SE4	0.358	0.700	0.489	0.621	0.550	0.531
SE5	0.538	0.768	0.603	0.612	0.652	0.621
HS1	0.305	0.522	0.761	0.439	0.417	0.533
HS2	0.315	0.505	0.732	0.391	0.387	0.490
HS3	0.374	0.558	0.679	0.455	0.445	0.521
HS4	0.368	0.585	0.811	0.503	0.550	0.552
HS5	0.511	0.630	0.819	0.573	0.672	0.518
HS6	0.316	0.546	0.743	0.509	0.549	0.471
HS7	0.444	0.577	0.781	0.551	0.622	0.570
HS8	0.393	0.647	0.772	0.587	0.566	0.636
HS9	0.528	0.664	0.775	0.55	0.642	0.650
IP1	0.324	0.641	0.525	0.752	0.545	0.555
IP2	0.431	0.575	0.454	0.809	0.548	0.459
IP3	0.468	0.692	0.652	0.788	0.686	0.552
IP4	0.384	0.465	0.404	0.731	0.429	0.435
IP5	0.382	0.615	0.517	0.722	0.502	0.535
IP6	0.246	0.398	0.297	0.538	0.370	0.300
PF1	0.498	0.550	0.504	0.392	0.745	0.519
PF2	0.456	0.614	0.611	0.586	0.791	0.465
PF3	0.551	0.647	0.598	0.623	0.813	0.533
PF4	0.632	0.622	0.533	0.589	0.750	0.593
PF5	0.558	0.514	0.545	0.580	0.762	0.576
MS1	0.476	0.601	0.571	0.537	0.594	0.839
MS2	0.519	0.647	0.669	0.529	0.656	0.839
MS3	0.474	0.655	0.590	0.544	0.564	0.826
MS4	0.547	0.637	0.549	0.589	0.548	0.814
MS5	0.387	0.534	0.508	0.462	0.397	0.700

Note: CR = Career; SE = Self-esteem; HS = Hard Skills; IP = Interpersonal Skills; PF = Performance; MS = Managerial Skills.

According to Kline (2011), the threshold of HTMT value should be 0.85 to proof sufficient discriminant validity in the data. Since all the HTMT values were below 0.85, discriminating validity between all the constructs was established.

Table1.4 HTMT Table

	Career	Hard skills	Interpersonal skills	Managerial skills	Performance	Self-esteem
Career						
Hard skills	0.541					
Interpersonal skills	0.573	0.745				
Managerial skills	0.653	0.804	0.773			
Performance	0.772	0.807	0.848	0.805		
Self-esteem	0.696	0.891	0.965	0.929	0.935	

4 ANALYSIS

The demographic analysis found that 65 (64.4%) of the respondents were female while 36 (35.6%) were male. By looking at the age, over half of the respondents were at the range of 20-35 years old, followed by 16 (15.8%) of 35-40 years old, 13 (12.9%) of 40-45 years old and others. 29 respondents (28.7%) worked as government servants, followed by 29 (28.7%) whom were regular employee, 18 (17.8%) junior manager, 16 (15.8%) manager, 5 (5%) director, 3 (3%) senior manager, and 1 (1.0%) was general manager. Approximately 77 (76.2%) of the respondents had current job related to MBA area of study while 24 (23.8%) did not say so. Based on the findings, 7 (29.2%) developed new career interest after graduating with MBA, followed by 5 (20.8%) who found an exceptional opportunity, 4 (16.7%) found that the job in their field did not offer opportunities with advancement, 3 (12.5%) found that their area of study had no direct connection and 1 (4.2%) confined the job search to a specific city or religion.

The findings further revealed that 55(54.5%) of the respondents claimed that their income changed after graduating from the MBA program while 46(45.5%) of the respondents claimed that their income did not change. In terms of current job position, 32 (31.7%) of the respondents were holding the position of regular employee, 25 (24.8%) others, 22 (21.8%) manager, 8 (7.9%) senior manager, 6 (5.9%) general manager, and 1(1.0%) director, vice president and CEO respectively. About 82.2% (83) of the respondents had full time current job while 18 (17.8%) had part time current job. Further, 58 (57.4%) of the respondents earned higher salary after graduating from MBA, 34 (33.7%) earned approximately the same salary, and 9 (8.9%) earned a lower salary.

Pearson correlation was computed to examine the relationship between independent variables (managerial skills, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, hard skills and dependent variable (performance). It was found that there was a significant correlation between managerial skills and performance ($r=0.673$, $p<0.05$), self-esteem confidence and performance ($r=0.756$, $p<0.05$), interpersonal skills and performance ($r=0.699$, $p<0.05$), and hard skills and performance ($r=0.704$, $p<0.05$). Based on the findings, the

correlation between IV and DV was at the moderate and strong level.

The results further revealed that the majority of the respondents claimed that they can manage people, project and career after taking the MBA courses. A large number of respondents (>80%) were aware of the managerial skills and understood different types of leadership skills. In terms of self-confidence, 87 (86.1%) of the respondents agreed that they had greater self-confidence, and 84 (83.2%) had better job prospect in the future. Approximately 87 (86.1%) of the respondents had business skills, and 79 (78.2%) had greater appreciation for the global nature of business. 93 (92.1%) of the respondents were more independent, self-reliant, and responsible.

Over 80% of the respondents were able to resolve team conflict and demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity. About 75 (74.3%) of the respondents were able to use creativity and innovation to solve problems. A large number of respondents were able to interact effectively with people, and developed a strong sense of ethical and social responsibility. By looking at the aspect of hard skills, 86 (85.1%) of the respondents had stronger skills in 1-on-1 and group oral communication. The majority of the respondents also claimed that they had stronger skills in written communication, and skills in negotiation. Over three quarter of the respondents were able to implement a vision and strategy, and able to lead a cross-functional team. Furthermore, it was found that the respondents could use creativity and innovation to solve problem, were able to lead ethically and responsibly, and lead in business environment.

The results from the multiple regression analysis indicated that self-esteem and confidence ($b=0.327$, $p=0.014$), interpersonal skills ($b=0.256$, $p=0.021$) and hard skills ($b=0.238$, $p=0.016$) were significant predictors towards job performance. However, managerial skills insignificantly predicted performance ($b=0.114$, $p=0.249$). R square measures how well the set of independent variables explain the outcome. Based on the five findings, four predictors of performance predicted

0.642 (64.2%) variance in the current performance.

By looking at the beta, for every 1 unit changes in self-esteem confidence, the changes of performance will be 0.327. Similarly, other

variables will be changed according to their weighted. In terms of contribution, Self-esteem and confidence ($b=0.327$) had the strongest effect towards performance, followed by interpersonal skills ($b=0.256$), hard skills ($b=0.238$), and the weakest effect was managerial skills ($b=0.114$).

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	.288		.303	.951	.344
Manage Skills	.114		.098	.117	1.160
Self Confidence	.327		.131	.307	2.506
Interpersonal Skills	.256		.109	.230	2.342
Hard Skills	.238		.097	.242	2.455

The findings of the indicated the need to continue honing student's lifelong learning skills in the MBA Program and business school. Students found that the skills taught on developing managerial skills had no significant relationship with job performance, which shows that the school needs to organize periodic workshops and seminars to promote managerial skills amongst their students. The institute should also integrate some changes in their management sciences curriculum to promote managerial skills by incorporating more case studies and real life examples in the MBA curriculum. Students should be provided with practical learning opportunities to practice managerial skills by organizing a group activity. Whetten and Chameron (2011) further added that students must be provided practical knowledge of work life setting by using simulation exercises to improve the students' competency in a managerial role by demonstrating to them the good managerial skills.

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